

ARCHITECTURAL SOCIOLOGY: THEORIES, METHODS AND SUBJECTS<sup>2</sup>

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Sociology has long ignored the material elements of our culture, especially the built environment. We cannot say that sociology has not considered the questions concerning architecture, or more so, urban planning and urban development, but it has considered them only as a consequence, an impression, or a symbol of the decisions of society, merely a stage, almost a subordinate backdrop to the “real” sociological problem. In the first part of the 20th century, sociology clearly distanced itself from the “technical” questions of architecture. This meant that while the texts of art history, for instance, evaluated architectural accomplishments on a regular basis, sociologists ignored the urban and residential areas, where they made their “social” observations. Though the paradigm change of the 1970s, known as the contextual turn, brought in new angles, especially regarding the questions of spatial awareness, sociology still kept clear of actual architectural matters. This is not the obvious strategy laid out for sociology, but rather a characteristic feature of decisions made through scientific discourse. By taking a fleeting glance at the works of ethnography or cultural anthropology, we may establish that architecture, in its material reality, can play a key role in the toolbox of the social scientist. It is also telling that the great sociological classics of the 20th century, like the works of Durkheim, Simmel, Elias and Foucault have all dealt with the correspondence of architecture and society, but their results in that regard have only been touched upon by the history of sociology. A significant change has been introduced only in the last two or three decades as part of German “cultural sociology” (*Kultursoziologie*).

Without presenting a comprehensive list, we mention here a few key figures in this process. Wolfgang Eßbach (2004, 2011) has shown the science historical definiteness of the “dematerialised” subject of sociology, and the possibilities of research into the material forms of society. Joachim Fischer (2002) may take credit for removing the image of the “talking human” from the centre of sociological research and putting in its place the human who uses space actively and moves around it, by reviving philosophical anthropology. Furthermore, Fischer and Makropoulos (2004) invited several sociological theories to view from their respective perspective on the architectural, medial, economic and politic reality of the ‘Potsdamer Platz’ in the new capital of Germany, Berlin (after the revolution of 1989 and the German reunification). Bernhard Schäfers (2003) published his textbook titled *Architektursoziologie*, which played an important role in making this phrase known in the German-speaking cultural-sociological world. A few years later, Heike Delitz’s (2009) book with the same title aimed at a clear positioning of the emerging scientific field, in collecting classical and newer, implicit and explicit approaches of a sociology of architecture. In the form of an introduction, this book established the identity of this young field of science, and provided its first “theoretical history” with a concise summary of the German, French and Anglo-Saxon traditions. In 2010, her monography *Gebaute Gesellschaft. Architektur als Medium des Sozialen* aimed at a theoretical approach in seeing architecture as a *constitutive* mode of the institution of society, rather than being only an ‘expression’ of the ‘real’ social. Again in 2009, a volume of es-

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1 Vice-Rector for Science of Apor Vilmos Catholic College, archivist at National Archives of Hungary

2 This text is part of the author’s project within the Bolyai János Research Scholarship 2018–2021, at the Institute for Sociology, Centre for Social Sciences.

says was published with the goal to show the possibility and productivity of different theoretical approaches of sociology in analysing the ‘architecture of society’ (Fischer–Delitz 2009). From the last decade, we should mention Silke Steets’ (2015) work, in which he created the microsociological theory for the birth of architectural space, and the volume of essays edited by Uta Karstein and Thomas Schmidt-Lux (2017), which reveals the material, mainly architectural aspects of religious life, frequently quoting Wolfgang Eßbach’s basic thesis; or Heike Delitz’ (2018) heuristic, comparative matrix of four very different ‘architectural modes of collective existence’. By publishing our thematic issue, we wanted to give an English language channel to this architectural sociological school that is taking shape in the German-speaking sociological world, and also to call the attention of the professionals that read in English to the results and empirical possibilities of this new field of science.

We also consider presenting the Hungarian research results in this field to the international public as a similarly important goal. In Hungary, we are only at the beginning of the organisational work which aims at institutionalising architectural sociology. The guest editor of our current issue also works on the borders of sociology and architecture, and has been publishing in this area since the early aughts. The year 2017 was a milestone, with the start of the *TÉRformák TÁRsadalomformák* (Space Forms, Society Forms) book series,<sup>3</sup> which has seen six volumes so far. Adapting to possibilities, the book series does not define itself as an architectural sociology volume, but is open to all subjects and angles which aim at the human scientific analysis of the built environment. The English language special issue of SOCIO.HU was edited in a similar spirit. We publish a mix of essays both from authors who work in the field of architectural sociology in the narrow sense of the word, and from authors who come from a different theoretical background, but have headed in a similar direction.

In our collection, Heike Delitz’s essay stands in first place, not accidentally. Although, in her essay, she puts a seemingly special ethnographical question in the center (the architectural transformations of nomadic, and of further extra-modern modes of society, within the ‘urban’, 21st century), the theoretical part of her essay is a possible summary of the paradigm of architectural sociology. Following the structural anthropology from Claude Lévi-Strauss to Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, she also suggests a methodology within the cultural sociology of architecture, namely the – non-Eurocentric and non-evolutionistic – comparison of different ‘architectural modes of collective existence’ (cf. Delitz 2018). The following two texts discuss relevant questions of contemporary architecture. Both works are connected with the German Architectural Sociology Association’s conference topic announcement from 2019, where the questions of architecture, society and digitalisation were discussed.<sup>4</sup> One of the organisers, Thomas Schmidt-Lux, decoded the symbolic messages of mega corporations’ central office headquarters, which proclaim digitalisation and with it a new lifestyle. Anita Aigner calls our attention to the acceleration of the process of capitalist housing development (capital flows) that lurks behind the colourful digital visualisations, which, in many cases, are far from reality. The next two texts are written by Gábor Oláh, and our guest editor, Máté Tamáska. Both of these texts approach their subjects from the aspect of classical architectural history. Though coming from different theoretical backgrounds, these texts approach the same problem: in the early 20th century, as a result of the turn of architecture and urban planning towards promoting international principles, local architectural characteristics are lost, and these local identities are increasingly seen as values that should be defended, in the professional (and later social) debates. The next big topic is the sociology of the architectural profession. Márkus Keller introduces to us the Hungarian post-war socialist regime, a period when the state exercised almost total control over architects (determining style as well), while at the same time considering architects as a privileged class, whose work it was hoped would carry a “society-shaping” force. In another approach to contemporary architectural roles, Venetsiya Dimitrova illustrates how mid-career architects working in leading architectural firms build their relative professional autonomy inside broad systems. The two closing studies turn to the

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<sup>3</sup> See: <https://tertar.webnode.hu>.

<sup>4</sup> 8. bis 9. März 2019, Universität Leipzig, Workshop der AG Architektursoziologie der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie.

approaches of traditional urban sociology, where we see the precipitation of macro sociological processes in connection to a local architectural phenomenon. The text of Róbert Gyökér leads the reader to the community spaces of Budapest, highlighting the heterogeneous forms of knowledge in our postmodern age through the study of a community garden. Rebeka Réka Balázs's paper, meanwhile, considers the coalitions that evolve in community planning. She writes, referring to Lefebvre, that an architectural intervention ultimately aims at the transformation of social patterns, and she presents an example from Teleki tér in Budapest that highlights the transformation wrought by gentrification.

Although the heterogeneity of the different fields and attitudes, as well as the dissimilarities of languages and paradigms of traditional approaches to sociology of urban settlements, and architectural history are present in the studies, this is not surprising at all, if we call to mind that we are talking about a field that is in constant development. We hope that this special issue of Socio.hu will strengthen the belief of those social scientists who are interested in the field that architecture is not a material world to be studied detached from society. Rather, architecture is a part of our social interactions, and familiarity with it should be part of the knowledge of a sociologist, just as studying housing and the structure of the village are part of the knowledge of an ethnographer.

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